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Archivists Accused of Mismanagement

Presidential Council Recommends Disciplinary Action Against Chief Officials

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Investigators for the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency have accused top officials of the National Archives of repeated mismanagement and suggested strict disciplinary actions be considered.

Office of Management and Budget Director Leon E. Panetta, whose office heads the council, told acting Archivist Trudy H. Peterson to "take actions necessary to protect the integrity" of the agency's programs and prepare recommendations for the new archivist to be appointed by President Clinton.

The report sharply criticized former archivist Don W. Wilson and other top officials still at the Archives—including former deputy archivist Claudine J. Weiher, chief of staff Raymond A. Mosley and assistant archivist James C. Megronigle.

The officials were criticized for appointing former Archives inspector general Lawrence A. Oberg and promoting his alleged cozy-with-management performance.

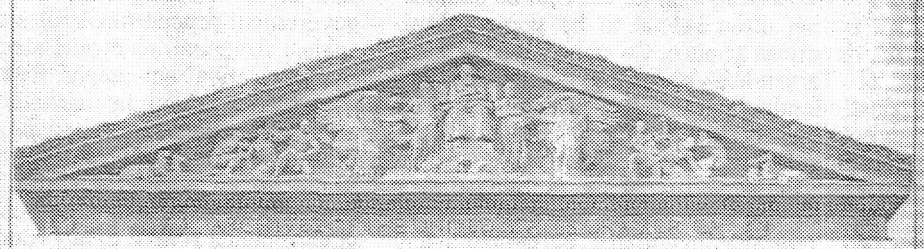
The new report further clouds the reputation of the agency, which has been rudderless since Wilson left under controversy March 31 to direct the George Bush Presidential Library at Texas A & M University.

The report found that Oberg failed to function with the independence and objectivity required by the 1978 Inspector General Act and instead "was supervised by and reported to the deputy archivist [Weiher]" in violation of the law.

The investigators said Oberg improperly disclosed the identity of employee-complainants to Archives management, routinely gave Archives personnel officials access to IG investigative files and permitted continued operation of a billing system that gave Archives managers access to the phone numbers of whistle-blowers and other informants.

The report, and other documents obtained by The Washington Post, show that former archivist Wilson concluded last December that Oberg "cannot be trusted to the high degree absolutely required of the Inspector General." But after negotiating with Oberg's lawyer, Wilson approved an

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION



- **MISSION:** Establish policies and procedures for managing U.S. government records.
- **HISTORY:** The agency was created in 1984 as the successor to the National Archives Establishment, established 50 years earlier.
- **HEADQUARTERS:** 7th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue NW.
- **OTHER OFFICES:** 33 offices (headquarters, personnel center, nine presidential libraries, 10 federal records centers and 12 regional archives).
- **BUDGET AND STAFF:** $193 million for fiscal 1994; approximately 3,000 employees.
- **DOCUMENTS HOUSED AT THE ARCHIVES:** The collections in Washington include more than 4 billion paper records, 7 million photographs, 300,000 video and sound tapes, 2 million maps and charts, 2 million architectural and engineering plans and 9 million aerial photographs. The Declaration of Independence, Constitution and Bill of Rights are displayed at the headquarters.

—Compiled by Barbara J. Saffir

SOURCES: National Archives and Records Administration, U.S. Government Manual

arrangement whereby Oberg was demoted only one pay grade and given another, $73,619-a-year job at the Archives.

"Adverse action" letters were also removed from Oberg's personnel file and Wilson agreed to take no further action on the issues at hand, including "misleading" statements in a deposition for the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee.

The report also said the "NARA [the National Archives and Records Administration] voluntarily undertook to reimburse Oberg's attorney in an amount exceeding $10,000."

The investigators challenged the legality of the payment, which was authorized by Mosley on Feb. 12, and said there was "case precedent for the approving official to make restitution when attorney fees were paid without appropriate authorization."

Archives spokeswoman Susan Cooper said yesterday that Mosley "signed the agreement at the direction of the archivist [Wilson]," who was out of town that day. She said the Archives pursued the settlement with Oberg under a 1991 General Accounting Office opinion favoring "amicable settlement of disputes" and relieving certifying officials of liability under certain circumstances.

According to the report, Oberg was named IG in 1989 from a field of 19 candidates, although he "ranked among those with the least audit and/or investigative experience." The selection was based in part on a recommendation by Megronigle that the investigators said was "misleading, if not false" because it credited Oberg with investigative and auditing experience that he did not have.

Reached at the Federal Records Center in Suitland, Oberg said, "I haven't seen the report so I'm going to terminate the conversation." The report said Oberg declined, on legal advice, to answer queries "without being given immunity from criminal prosecution."

Senate Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman John Glenn (D-Ohio) said he was "very disturbed at the willful disrespect for official duties, laws, ethics, and the integrity of public service demonstrated by former archivist Wilson, and all of the officials named in this report."

Wilson, under fire earlier this year for giving President Bush exclusive legal control of the computerized records of his presidency, "left town under a dark cloud of mismanagment and conflict of interest," Glenn charged, adding that "the darkest part of the cloud still hangs above" the institution.

Wilson has denied any conflict of interest in signing the agreement with Bush. He was also criticized as "the absentee archivist" for delegating responsibility of internal operations to Weiher, now assistant archivist for the office of special and regional archives.

The report recommended that Clinton's new archivist consider disciplinary action against Oberg for taking directions from Archives program managers and breaching employee confidentiality, against Weiher and others for compromising the IG's independence, and against Megronigle "for completing a misleading appraisal" that was material to Oberg's appointment.

Cooper said neither Weiher nor Megronigle would have any comment.